

A

S E R M O N

INTENDED TO ENFORCE THE

REASONABLENESS AND DUTY,

ON

Christian, as well as Political, Principles,

OF THE AEOLITION OF THE

AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE.

BY THE REV. J. M.

L O N D O N:

SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

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T O

GRANVILLE SHARPE, Esq. Chairman,

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A N D

To the Rest of the Members of the So-
ciety instituted in London for the Pur-
pose of effecting the ABOLITION of the

A F R I C A N S L A V E - T R A D E :

The following Discourse is, with the
sincerest Confidence and Zeal in the
Justice of their Cause, and,

With the highest Respect and Esteem,

dedicated and inscribed.

March 20th, 1788.

*The Profits of this Publication are to be appropriated to the
benevolent Designs of the Society instituted in London for
the Purpose of effecting the Abolition of the African Slave-
trade.*

A S E R M O N, &c.

HEBREWS xiii. 3.

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them ; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

ST. Paul, the most warm and zealous minister of the doctrines of Christ, having undertaken the conversion and teaching of the churches in Asia, concludes his very animated and interesting epistle to the Hebrews, with admonitions suitable to the ends of that benevo-

lence which his great Master had promulgated to the world. Philanthropy was one of the first recommendations that he strove to instil into the minds of his disciples; and in this he was the more zealous, in order to correct the obstinate and selfish manners which had so long prevailed, uninterrupted, among the Jewish and Gentile nations.

To make the afflictions of others our own; to participate in another's wrongs, and soothe the pang that corrodes the wounded heart, are the latent virtues of every human breast, which it was the glory of Christianity to call forth into active life. These distinguishing characteristics of humanity are further ennobled by that high sense

sense of gratitude which we, and every other being, feel, and insensibly express, in the general and involuntary acknowledgment of Deity, which pervades all the habitable part of creation. Gratitude would become a much more prominent feature in our frame, if the constant pursuit of worldly interest, and sensual pleasure, did not unite, with unparalleled ardour, to blunt the virtue that carries our minds up to heaven, before we become versed and hackneyed in the ways of men. We learn a plausible talent of boasting of such virtues, without resolving to practise them; we pretend to court and admire the principle, but we seem to give up the delight of cultivating and improving it, contented with beholding it in the active zeal of a

few individuals, who merely become the theme of scholastic exercise, or the transient example of theatrical praise.

But if we would reflect, we might use that pride which burns so high within us, in ensuring our glory in the world, and our acceptance in heaven : for the smallest individual has much more in his power than he conceives ; every one fills a character in society, and no man is so mean as to become of no account : utility and humanity constitute the virtue of a social being ; these will direct him, and secure his integrity, and his best success : his support, his protection, his footing courtesy, are not less his duty than the maintenance of his family, the acquisition of gain,

gain, or the station in society he is called to fill: these, the lowest in order amongst us is capable of, and often finds himself engaged to perform: and he feels it a delightful office to pour balm into the wounds of sorrow, to heal the broken hearted, to set the miserable captive free, or to remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being themselves also in the body.

I have premised these short traits of the human character, in order to awaken you, by an application of the words just repeated, to the subject of the African Slave Trade, which demands your compassion

and early interposition, as a free and Christian people.

The equality of human beings renders every duty reciprocal and indispensable to them all ; the cultivation of the mind has ennobled and enlarged its great and dormant talents, and rendered, by invigorating principle and education, those abilities more conspicuous, with which nature had impressed it at its birth. If it has fallen to our lot to enjoy the blessings of cultivation ; and if our knowledge is opened and matured by science and the laws of government ; how much more, therefore, is our requisite proportion of gratitude, our compassion and protection towards ignorance and defenceless innocence,

cence, towards uncivilized nations, and men yet untaught to know the glory and beneficence of our God ! The same Almighty Being has invested different climes with different properties ; kept some far backward from the dawn of truth, while he has yet extended his mercy alike to all, by mingling the cup of blessings and afflictions together, and by lessening the wants of those, whose proportions of good he has thought proper to abridge. But we have the foolish vanity to pride *ourselves* in these acquirements, and attribute their glory to our own deservings ; the hand that gave them may this night, nay, even this hour, summon us to restore them. He that planted us here, and gave us the blessings of a land of freedom, of the light

of his gospel, of the knowledge of good and evil, and of all the blessings and comforts of social life ; might have been pleased to raise us in the woods of America, or the recesses of Africa ; we ourselves might have been the wretched victims of the tyranny they endure, and might have wasted our days, our sighs and tears, in the countless miseries of western labours and oppression.

We should reflect, also, that this country, now the emporium of commerce and of science, was once veiled in the cloud of superstition and early ignorance ; but it pleased God to plant the seeds of his new promulgation in the same soil ; civilization and freedom sprung up and choked

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the expiring shoots of intolerant persecution and error ; and, as a phoenix bursting from the flame, the mild religion of Jesus has been cultivated and restored almost to its pristine simplicity, amid the ruins of sin, and the intemperate enormities of Antichrist : by superior energy, by unexampled majesty, by the sublime light of truth, it has quenched the fiery ordeals that once blazed around it, has withstood the vain terrors of hierachal power, and broke down the barriers that obstructed its benevolent progress.—If this country has sprung in the lap of freedom, and caught the glorious principle of unshaken fortitude in such a cause, how much more is the portion of our requisite gratitude, that we are taught a religion agree-

able to our political principles, and that we are able to behold, with religious, as well as national veneration, the structure that has been raised by the prosperous zeal of our ancestors ; and to adore, with holy fervour, the emanation that shone propitious to our modern eminence among the nations of the earth !

The progress of manners, science, commerce, and arts, cherished, if we may thus presume, by a source so benign, could not fail to rush forwards with a rapidity unobstructed, to that honour and superiority, which they have acquired.

Let it then be our boast to hand the blessing down to our posterity, with the same

fame unsullied zeal with which it has been entrusted to our hands : let us maintain this glory that we boast, and preserve, by our continued and unshaken virtue and humanity, the character we have thus attained.

Such, then, would certainly be the just superiority in which the people of this nation would be viewed by all others, in their civil capacity, if they had not one great national offence which casts upon them a load of reproach, that has grown into a burden too great for them to bear. I have often told you, that the religion, or the gratitude, which influences not the conduct, is vain and of no account before God ; the blessings of freedom, and the light of Christianity, were granted to

us,

us, in order to animate our example in deeds of mercy and truth; every one ceases to be truly a man, when he ceases to be merciful;—the clemency that we enjoy was given to render us instrumental in diffusing its balm around us, in every climate where we should extend our commerce and our name. To confine it within the limits of our own small domain, is not to fulfil the duties to which we are called; it is to oppose the large and extensive bounty with which we are entrusted, and to conceal the light intended for the whole universe, to the enjoyment of individual and selfish avarice.

Here, then, arises the charge of inconsistency: the claim of liberal communication

cation of all our blessings throughout all our dominions is roused, and demands our obedience ; the claim is justified by our laws, and by the virtue we boast so loudly to possess ; the claim is strengthened by the excellence of our principle and profession, and the base contradiction of our example. These, alas ! have almost sunk into vain glory, and the fame of our superior integrity is gone forth like a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

How melancholy is the reflection, that the honour of a nation, which once was, and still might rise so high, should, for sordid avarice, or more reprehensible luxury, sink so low ! But the pride of the mighty is humbled, as well by the snare of temptation,

ation, as by the visitation of evil. The chief sin that has arisen of late years to an enormity, which our posterity will hesitate to believe, and has thus brought low the high spirit of British virtue, is the traffic in which we are so deeply plunged, in the slavery of our fellow creatures.

Although there is a visible chain of being, from the lowest and simplest of created life, to the perfection of Almighty Goodness, the order of whose progression has astonished, and confounded, and surpassed the utmost intelligence of human discernment; and although it has been found impossible to mark with just precision the terminations of each peculiar scale; yet even such small distinctions

as the shades of complexion, or the difference of hair, have been urged, by design and artifice, as arguments to reduce the level and equality of part of the human species. Has not God then said true, when he has declared that, “ He “ hath made of one blood all nations of “ men, to dwell on all the face of the “ earth ? ” Shall we, mere atoms, that live and move and have our being but at the word of his power, shall we presume thus to account less of his creatures, than he hath appointed ? and do we exalt ourselves above others for a cause on which they have as equal a right to value themselves on a similar vain superiority ? I would not insult an audience respectable as the present, by suggestions in their

nature so inconsistent, visionary and absurd.

If to attack by force and surprise, and to enslave in unceasing misery and bonds during life, the innocent, the unwary, and unoffending, be justifiable; then is my preaching vain, and then is Christianity become false doctrine, and the light of truth, and the promised rewards of immortality, deceptions to the human mind: yet, shame to the name of Christian! wherever we turn our eyes, where the fame of discovery has led our ambitious brethren in the faith, ruin, bloodshed and devastation, barbarity and horror, unparalleled by the most savage tribes, have signalized our arms, and brought a

stain indelible on the cause of Christianity, that can never be wiped away ! Where we have found, throughout the western or eastern hemispheres, simplicity, religion, peace, and brotherly love, fit and amiable qualities for the Christian faith ; we have visited them with artifice, with treacheries, with the bloodshed of warfare, with the ravage of barbarians ; overturning their altars, subverting their governments, breaking their peace, infringing their bonds of affinity and affection, and pouring upon them the miseries of ignominy, torture, or slavery !

It is thus that an untameable thirst of gain plunges mankind into a total insensibility to God, and their own salvation ;

and renders them the depraved oppressors of all who are not so deeply skilled in chicanery and intrigue as themselves: but the equality of God's blessings, still more than all other arguments, sets mankind on a strict level with each other; however profits and advantages may externally represent some amid a festive and attractive glare, yet beneath that false shew often lies a canker-worm, that, in their own estimation, which is all the little sum of human happiness, reduces them to envy the lot of those they are accustomed openly to despise. How many are there who would not willingly lay down their tinsel and their gaudy plumes, and gladly take up the simple garb of unoffending honesty and plain dealing! And, to bring this matter

home to our present subject, let me ask those who have not strangely contrived to stifle all reflection, whether while they have rioted in festive pleasures, or slumbered on downy ease, by the productions of unrelenting labour, or of the kidnapping and traffic in the blood of their fellow-creatures, whether they had not rather exchange their despicable eminence for a humble station, and an untroubled mind ? The preference then is obvious.

But yet we live and profess to be the children of a Christian soil ; we boast our desire to see and promote the spread of our faith ; we presume to call ourselves disciples of our blessed Master ; to address our supreme Creator in his name ; to im-

plore his sanction and aid in all our endeavours to please him ; in all our anxieties we implore his mercy ; and we look for his blessing on all our darling hopes and schemes ;—but, alas ! how can we thus presume to deride even the Divine Majesty itself, while we suffer ourselves to be led away from all consistency, from all justice, from all humanity, by the solid and insatiable thirst of the riches of this world, that in a few transient years, at the longest, will afford us no help to attain the highest eminence of all, a tranquil mind ! Do any of us credit a man's doctrine whose conduct testifies an avowed contempt of it ? Do we rest upon a man's veracity, whose lips speak no other than the language of falsehood ? Do we seek for truth,

truth, honour, or virtue in the ways of dishonour, wickedness and error? How then can we ever expect, nay, how can we dare to assert it as an argument, that we are justified in the rapine and slavery of unenlightened nations, as a preparatory means of converting them to the light of the gospel of Christ? Surely that light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, will in God's due time shed its rays over the dejected continent of Africa; rays far more congenial, and far more suitable to the mild and pious language of the blessed Jesus!

So much has been said and written upon the subject of this unnatural and unwarrantable traffic, that it becomes now almost superfluous to detain you by long recapitu-

lations ; yet, as my duty extends to the guarding your minds from the baneful influence of corrupt example, it likewise demands that I should set before you the moral law of God and nature, on every occasion, where through supineness or inattention your judgments might be led astray. As members, therefore, of a Christian community, at last rousing from the corrupt lethargy in which you have so long slumbered, let me sound the alarm before you that is gone out through all lands, and has awakened every human eye to watch your conduct in the present moment.

When I recall to your consideration, that a part of your fellow countrymen,

professing the Christian faith, have adopted, and that their descendants have continued in this enlightened age, the horrors of rapine and slaughter, of remorseless murders, and of cruel devastation; have made themselves the corrupters of unenlightened princes, taught them the chicane and villainy of causeless wars, and to be the perpetrators of punishments unmerited, in order to purchase or plunder from them millions of their innocent subjects: when I see you tremble at the enormity of accounting the victims of their treachery in a meaner light than any common article of merchandise, in the miseries of a painful and tedious voyage, in the rude exposition of a public vendue, in the pang of separation, not only from their country, but

from every tie which affection can hold dear ; and doomed, for the remainder of their days, to the ignominious lash of oppressive task-masters, and all their future progeny doomed for ever to hopeless servitude ;—when I see you weep for the sigh that only serves to increase the scoffs of tyranny ; and see you dwell upon the sad reflection that laments the full-swoln grief which bursts from that high sense of honour, with which the native African scorns with indignation the fetter or the lash ;—then it is I behold you in a glorious conflict, spurning with detestation the authors of a scene like this ; and, contrasting it with the benign spirit of the Gospel which you cherish, I hear you devoutly implore the mercy of Heaven, that a just wrath

wrath may be spared from the devoted heads of so many of your fellow countrymen, and that they may be brought to a sense of the knowledge of the law, and sin no more ; that they may remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them ; and them that are in adversity, as being themselves also in the body. Can any one of you believe that a human being reduced thus to sorrow, can ever find leisure from his miseries and his labour, to learn the language of the Gospel ? Look to the example he constantly sees before him ;—cruelty and oppression are always accompanied by impiety and irreligion.—Can the slave wish to be a Christian, from the example of his owners, or from the master who employs him, has purchased

him,

him, and assumes a false right to alienate him again ? Can he wish to leave his warm devotion to the one great all-seeing Power he adores, for that faith which he never hears but in mingled expressions of blasphemy and cursing ? If it be answered that missionaries are appointed, for the sole purpose of teaching the Christian doctrines to these labourers in sorrow ; I wish to speak the acknowledged fact, and demand why so plausible a purpose is evaded ? Why do some planters contrive to hinder or prevent their instruction, by not affording them time, or obstructing their little progress at the short moments allowed for their devotion ;—it is, however, true, that in one of the islands (Antigua) the Moravian missionaries have had more success, because the

negroes in some plantations there have not been interrupted; and their sobriety of conduct, and piety at their assemblies of devotion, is an honour to themselves, their teachers, and their owners; and proves, to a clear demonstration, that their capacities, when cultivated, as much entitle them to the rank of human beings amongst us, as any of our own country or complexion.

It is a sad reflection upon this nation, that the slaves of English planters are, for the most part, every where treated with more severity, and exacted upon for more excessive labour, than any of the foreign merchants; how then can we expect any other than constant resentments amongst

them?—Revert to this summary of our injustice towards them, and ask yourselves whether you do not freely justify their hatred: where you will have servitude at the demands of oppression, there you must not expect fidelity.

But I have a further proof of the most wild inconsistency in these dealers in human blood;—a proof that shews, where interest has over-run its market; where, by striving to grasp more than the hand can hold, the possession is lost for ever! Lenity of treatment would have produced a tenfold profit to those plantations, which are now encumbered with debt for the supply of slaves worn out in less than nine years labour! So short a space of existence in that condition may be a blessing to the

slave.

slave, but I tremble for the heavy retribution that may follow to his master !—Small proportions of labour, and reasonable refreshment, have in several instances in another island (Barbadoes) contributed to render the estates flourishing and prosperous, and the slaves have lived long, and, saving the loss of country and family, altogether comfortable : and if it were suitable to address you from this place in terms better adapted to the resorts of commerce, I could amply satisfy you, that, from the fertility of the soil alone, a resource of trade might be opened with the natives of Africa, that would restore the smiles of cultivation along those dreary coasts of Angola and Senegal, which the slave-trade has rendered barren,— that our manufactures would thereby

thereby be furnished with their most essential materials, and would afterwards find the readiest and most advantageous market there, and returns far more speedy and ample, would be made both to the revenue of the nation, and to the individual merchant, surpassing the present advantages of sugars from the western colonies.

But once plunged deep in any undertaking, men rather prefer their fate to reformation—even to these striking instances of preference which virtue and honourable commerce hold out to them, they have turned a deaf ear, and seek even a smaller profit accompanied with injustice !

It is further alleged, that the natives of Africa would be doomed to severer tortures, if

if they were left in their own country, by punishments there inflicted on all prisoners of war and criminals : I know that all savage nations have generally the unhappy attribute of cruelty ; but have we a right to become arbiters of their laws or customs ? Besides, if we look to the source of these punishments, we shall trace most of them to ourselves, in corrupting their princes to become marauders for us, to range and set on fire defenceless villages, and to surround and captivate the fugitives for safety ! to exercise the most wanton power of punishment to men ignorant of their guilt ; in order to condemn them to the alternative of cruel tortures or foreign slavery !

But let me awaken all who justify this traffic, which you see involves in it so many

many evils, to justice and common sense; let them ponder between their duty and their affairs—I offer them terms, by which both may be amended : to reform the abuse only, would be to crop only the weeds of a prolific soil, which to-morrow's sun brings forth into new luxuriance—a good harvest depends on the entire clearness of the soil.

If, by an abolition of this heinous sin, there are any evil consequences to be dreaded, they can be but of short duration—until cultivation and commerce of the soil can be established; and as much of that part of the scheme has already been mingled with the other, the difficulties arising from novelty can be but few; it is almost needless I should urge you further; the case stands on such fair

fair and obvious grounds, that truth seems to dictate to your hearts and judgments ; but more than all, your eternal happiness is at stake ; which of you would risk the benefits of a perpetuity, for a mere life estate ?

Awake, then, to righteousness, and sin not ; may the light of heavenly truth guide you, strengthen, settle you, in the grand work of reforming yourselves from so grievous a burden upon you ; shew yourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, and by remembering them that are in bonds and in adversity, as being of the same body, that is, of the same quality or feeling as yourselves, worship God in spirit and in truth ; and remember that you can never hope to receive mercy from heaven, if you shut up your own bowels of compassion from your brother, and him that is in need.

A P R A Y E R.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, who from thy throne beholdest all the dwellers upon earth, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, and art graciously pleased to behold this thy family of creatures here below; we, thy humble servants, do beseech thee to inspire our hearts continually with the most grateful sense of thy mercy towards us; that so, being guided and directed to acknowledge the manifold blessings we enjoy at thy hands, may be ready to embrace the opportunity thou hast entrusted to our care, of diffusing them to all our fellow-creatures around us: teach us, we pray thee, to be instrumental in spreading the light and influence of thy holy word, among all those who are yet in ignorance, by copying the great example of philanthropy and love which we received from thy blessed Son; that our hearts may be softened by compassion for the afflictions of others, and our zeal animated only by Christian love: do thou grant, O blessed Father of all mercies, that all those who

are any ways dependant upon, or connected with us, or known to us, in the concerns of this present life, may yet have cause to bless us, and no longer to put up their tears of sorrow to thy throne in complaints against us: restore us, O Lord, to thy favour and mercy, open our hearts that we may be cleansed from our former sin, that we may fulfil all the duties for which we were called into being with integrity and diligence; awaken us once more to righteousness; renew a right spirit within us; and make us to remember those that are in bonds, and them that suffer adversity. Strengthen us in the cause and promotion of humanity and truth, and make us weak in oppression and injustice; enable us to resist the temptations of unwarrantable gain; and turn us from the practice of habitual sin; that so we may at length put off the evil of our offences, and praise thee with all meekness and reverence of heart, as becomes the true disciples of thy blessed Son, in spirit and in truth. Amen.